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Lenten and Easter Meditation: Voices of the Passion: The Seven Words from the Cross: The First Word, 1944

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The SEVEN WORDS FROM the Cross
The First Word
"FATHER FORGIVE THEM FOR THEY KNOW NOT WHAT THEY DO"

On Good Friday 1500 years ago Bishop Ambrose ascended his pulpit in the Cathedral of Milan and addressed his congregation in the following words: "I find it impossible to speak to you today. The events of Good Friday are too great for human words. Why should I speak while my Saviour is silent and dies?" Every preacher of the Cross has had this experience, especially when he compares the weakness of his own words with the majesty and power of the seven short sentences which our Lord spoke in the six hours from nine o'clock in the morning until three o'clock in the afternoon. With these seven words we enter the Holy of Holies of the plans of God for men.

We have come to watch a man die. Because we love ~~H~~im our watching is hard. We hang upon ~~H~~is last words and carry them in remembering hearts. What does ~~he~~ say ~~who~~ is now dying for the sin of the world?

"FATHER FORGIVE THEM FOR THEY KNOW NOT WHAT THEY DO". Like lightning his first word strikes directly into the heart of all the troubles of mankind. Once more the weary head goes up under the crown of thorns, a cry echoes out over the crowd, and the world hears a dying man point to the reason for death: "FATHER FORGIVE THEM FOR THEY KNOW NOT WHAT THEY DO". This first word from the Cross echoed back through the long corridors of time. It reached into a garden in the cool of the day. It recalled the dark memory of man's fall and the bright promise: "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel". This was now the end of that solemn pledge. God was now working out the plan conceived in the garden and worked out in a manger, in another garden and on a Cross. Here was God coming to the hearts of men, calling them by name and bringing them the greatest treasure the heart of God can give — the forgiveness of sins and peace with Him.

~~SEVEN WORDS~~ *From The Crown*
The First Word
"FATHER FORGIVE THEM FOR THEY KNOW NOT WHAT THEY DO"

Oct. 44

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Our hurried and forgetful age must see the meaning of this very clearly. Here is the terrible reality of sin. Clearly and definitely! There are a great many things which we can do about sin. We can be sorry for it, we can weep over it, we can regret it, we can offer some small reparation to those who have been hurt by it. One thing, however we cannot do. We cannot ~~forget~~^{for give} it. This only God can do. ^{Watch with} ~~Waiting for~~ Him under the Cross we hear ^a ~~voice~~^{voice} crying out of the long silences of eternity and over the noise and confusion of 2000 years: "Father forgive them for they know not what they do".

We have brought memories into this church. Some bless and some burn. There are things in our lives that we should like to forget. Here under the Cross is the washing of your memory and the drying of your tears. Here is relief from the tearing pain in your heart. These words are balm and benediction. When by the mercy of God we believe ~~them~~, the past is buried in the bottomless sea of the pity of God. "FATHER FORGIVE THEM FOR THEY KNOW NOT WHAT THEY DO"! here is the beginning of the ascent to Calvary. This is the amazing humanly impossible miracle of the Cross. This is the ~~miracle~~^{miracle} of forgiveness, the restoration of fellowship with God, the return to the Father's House. In Him Who died on the Cross our broken heart is healed and our union with God is restored. The great separation, so long and so bitter, has been ended by the reunion with God through Christ. Once more we have the freedom beneath ~~and~~ beyond all human freedoms. Ours is now the great freedom from fear, the freedom from want of God, the freedom of worship of God, the freedom of speech to God. All this and heaven too is in the simple words: "FATHER FORGIVE THEM FOR THEY KNOW NOT WHAT THEY DO".